



STATE OF CONNECTICUT
DEPARTMENT OF REHABILITATION SERVICES



Department of Rehabilitation Services
Testimony before the Human Services Committee
House Bill 6464 - March 24, 2015

Good afternoon Senator Moore and Representative Abercrombie and distinguished members of the Human Services Committee. My name is Amy Porter and I am the Commissioner of the Department of Rehabilitation Services or DORS. I am offering this testimony regarding House Bill 6464, An Act Assisting Mobility-Challenged Senior Citizens.

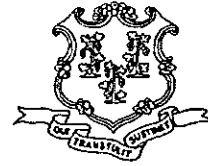
I want to first thank and commend the Committee for its ongoing support of persons with disabilities. Agencies such as DORS would not be able to do its work of bringing employment, independence and community engagement to our neighbors and friends with these challenges without your strong commitment in this area.

House Bill 6464 is another example of this support from you and so many of your colleagues in the legislature. The challenges faced by people with mobility restrictions can be great and are some of the biggest obstacles they need to overcome.

In fact, our agency already provides loans to people with disabilities of all ages, including senior citizens, for the purchase of motor vehicles intended or modified to transport mobility equipment such as scooters and wheelchairs. We do this using the Assistive Technology Loan Fund which is part of our larger Connecticut Tech Act Project, a federal program.

In the case of the bill at hand, however, we may not be able to assist in the way it envisions. We cannot, under the federal guidelines, provide loans from this fund to communities, towns and cities as written in line 6 of the bill. And while the federal guidelines might not necessarily control our purely state appropriations, we should make clear that we have no state monies available for such lending.

Conn. Gen. Stat. Sec. 17b-607, which would be amended by this bill, covers our Assistive Technology Revolving Fund. There is currently no state appropriation for our Revolving Loan fund. We received bonding funds back in 1993 as a match to our federal dollars. We use federal funding to operate the program and have since received private dollars from the bank that administers the loan program.



However, we can perhaps achieve some of the intent of this bill under our current program without any change in the law. As noted above, we can and do provide loans for modified vehicles, as well as other assistive technology devices, for individuals with disabilities and senior citizens. The loans are available to all eligible individuals based on factors such as a stable income source, expenses, ability to pay back the loan and no history of bankruptcy within the last three years.

The loan program is guided by federal law, so there are a couple of principles to which we must adhere. For example, our program does not have an age threshold or restriction. Applicants of all ages, including senior citizens, are eligible. The target population is individuals with disabilities of all ages and their family members, guardians, advocates, and authorized representatives. For eligibility purposes, we look for documentation of disability or functional limitation from a medical professional to determine need for the loan.

Again, our department wants to express our appreciation for the goals and intentions expressed in House Bill 6464. The programs we have in place today do assist people with disabilities, including senior citizens, with the purchase of vehicles needed to transport mobility equipment and therefore do accomplish some of the worthy goals of the bill. However, we do not have any available state appropriations to expand into the area of lending to municipalities as the bill contemplates - and federal rules will not allow us to do so within our existing lending program.

I want to thank the Committee for your attention to this important area of public policy. We are, of course, available for any further consultation in this matter.